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The Book of Revelation

or

The Apocalypse of John



By

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Lecture of The Hamilton Conference Theological Union
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PREFACE

This lecture was prepared for the annual meeting of the Hamilton Conference Theological Union, and is now published at the request of that organization. In acceding to that request, the writer wishes to state that he makes no claim to originality. With the exception of the summary, and one or two suggestions which he has ventured as to the interpretation of certain passages, almost everything of value will be found in the works of recognized scholars now available to all. The results of the work of these men of learning he has sought to digest and mediate to those who have not hitherto made their acquaintance, and to whom the Book of Revelation has presented apparently insoluble problems.

A college and university training should produce at least two results for every graduate. It should bring to him some adequate conception of the vastness of the great ocean of wisdom and knowledge whose fringes he has barely touched, and which no one mind can possibly explore in a lifetime. It should also furnish him with a method of study by means of which he will be enabled to navigate the bays and inlets wherein his life is to be spent and his work for humanity is to be accomplished. The writer believes that his university course did this much for him, and it has been a source of great pleasure and satisfaction from time to time to realize that with the aid of the great masters he has been able to add to his small stock of conquered territory some portions of the Book of books.

When the study of the Book of Revelation was undertaken some years ago, the student soon realized that one of the keys to the solution of its difficulties was to be found in Apocalyptic Literature. The special study was consequently abandoned for the time being that the more general study might be undertaken, and it would have been a congenial task to have lectured on this most interesting and important body of religious literature. But since we are now engaged in the greatest war in the world's history, and as one of the products of this conflict in the sphere of religious work is a vast amount of spurious and false teaching based on the Book of Revelation, which is being foisted upon an uninformed and therefore helpless and credulous people, he considered it a duty to give to as large a circle as he might reach, some of the results of those attempts to interpret the book on sane and scientific principles.

To those who may desire to undertake the study for themselves, the following works and authors are recommended. The best and most satisfactory treatment of the book from the modern standpoint will be found in Dr. Swete's "The Apocalypse of St. John," 1905; James Moffatt in "The Expositor's Greek Testament," 1910; Pounders'

"Historical Notes," 1914; Deane in "Handbooks for Bible Classes," 1915, a small volume which can be secured for seventy cents and contains in brief form the results of the best scholarship; C. Anderson Scott in "The Century Bible"; and F. C. Porter in "The Messages of the Apocalyptists." For a concise and satisfactory account of Apocalyptic Literature, nothing better than Porter's will be found. For a complete and exhaustive treatment the large volumes of Dr. Charles' "Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha" must be secured. There has since been issued, however, a smaller work by Oesterley, "The Books of the Apocrypha, etc." For the history of the interpretation of the book, Dr. Charles' small volume, "Studies in the Apoc'ypse," will be found helpful. This is a portion of a larger work about to be issued on the Book of Revelation for "The International Critical Commentary." For the historical situation, Sir Wm. Ramsay's "Messages to the Seven Churches" should be read. Of course the articles in Hastings' Dictionary and The Encyclopedia Biblica should be consulted.

That the reading of the following pages may create a greater interest in the study of the interbiblical period of Jewish history, particularly the literature of the time; and that it may also furnish some sound principles for the interpretation of a book of recognized difficulties, is the sincere hope of the writer.

W. B. SMITH.

Oakville, Ont.,
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THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

History of Interpretation.

During the 1900 years of the Christian Church's history no portion of God's word has proved to be more attractive and even alluring to Bible students than the Book of Revelation. It is safe to say that more literature has been produced, more explanations offered, and more commentaries and expositions published concerning this book than any other portion of the sacred writings, and yet, while it is true that so much has been written, and so much time and effort expended in attempting to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of its message, it is equally true that of this vast amount of literature, comparatively little is of any real value. This will be readily understood when it is learned that the great majority of these writers have followed the old and unscientific method of adopting some *a priori* theory, and then by the application of this theory, attempting to disclose the secret treasures which the book was supposed to contain.

The earliest writers whose views have come down to us, are Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Victorinus, who lived and labored from fifty to one hundred years after the book had been written and its message received by its first readers. They all use what is known as the Eschatological method, and all are strongly chiliastic in their interpretation, or, as we would say, they all stand firmly on the belief in the speedy return of Christ to defeat His enemies, set up His kingdom, and reign with His saints on the earth for a thousand years. In their writings, however, are found traces of a contemporary historical interpretation, by which they attempt to identify certain figures and references with persons and events of the author's own time. And again, there are to be found the beginnings of that tendency of the Alexandrian School to allegorize, a tendency which, as we shall see, held complete sway for more than eight hundred years. It succeeded in crowding out the Eschatological method as the opposition of the Empire to the Church died out and the Christian religion became more popular. Chiliasm then became a thing of the past, and Christ's reign of a thousand years was interpreted as simply a period in the history of the Church. To Tyconius it was that period between the first and second advents of Christ. The second was to take place three and a-half days, i.e., 350 years after the first or about 350 A.D. To most scholars and teachers it meant a thousand years from either the birth or the death of Christ, and so intense and widespread was this belief that when the year one

thousand approached great consternation prevailed and multitudes either gave or bequeathed all their possessions to the Church.

When this period passed and nothing unusual occurred, a tremendous reaction took place and the Church, secure in her sovereignty over the world, lost all fear, gave herself over to the secularizing influences of the times, and became self-complacent and corrupt. Such a condition of worldliness was sure to produce a second reaction within the Church in the opposite direction and a return of the Eschatological outlook. The chief exponent of this early reform movement was Joachim, who gave the Apocalypse a strongly anti-papal interpretation, predicted that the end of the present order would come in the year 1260, and identified the anti-christ with the Pope. Though his predictions of the end proved untrue, the anti-papal agitation continued, and during the 13th and 14th centuries, the Book of Revelation was the chief offensive weapon in the attacks on the abuses of the Roman Church. To Wycliffe in England, to Huss in Bohemia, to Luther in Germany, and all other opponents of papacy at this period, the occupant of the papal see was in very truth the anti-christ of the Scriptures. To papal scholars on the other hand, the same method brought the privilege of a very different solution, and to them the anti-christ was none other than Luther or the collective spirit which animated and inspired the whole body of the assailants of the Holy Roman Church. The arbitrary application of this unscientific method continued through the period of the Reformation and has persisted indeed in various forms to the present day. Countless examples might be cited, some adopting a world historical and others a church historical basis in order to determine the exact time of the end, and all identifying the anti-christ with some dreaded enemy of the day, from Mohammed and the Saracens at the time of the Crusades down to Frederick II of Prussia, and even the present Kaiser. Its utterly unscientific character, and hence its unreliable results, must be apparent to all. Its baneful influence may be seen in the fact that it opens the door for all kinds of enthusiasts to use a truly great and inspired book of God to support absurd and erroneous doctrines; that multitudes of sincere men and women have been duped and deluded by it in almost every generation of the Church's history; and lastly, that as a result of the multiplicity of theories and hypotheses which have been advocated, all based on the same false principle, such confusion has arisen that many devout and even scholarly men have despaired of ever arriving at a satisfactory explanation.

This despair has, however, happily proved to be ill founded. In the countless attempts made to interpret the book, ideas have from time to time been suggested, which persist in commending themselves to the minds of men as probable factors in a final solution. We have

seen that in the earliest commentaries there were attempts to identify certain figures and references with persons and events contemporary with the writer and his first readers. This is called the Contemporary Historical method, and though crowded out for hundreds of years by the Allegorical method, it was revived in the 16th century by Bibliander. He was followed a little later by the two Jesuits, Ribeira and Alcasar, and they again, toward the end of the 17th century, by the Protestant Grotius, and from the time of Grotius to the present the Contemporary Historical principle has been growing in favor as one of the necessary factors in a satisfactory interpretation. Victorinus, who, as we have seen, was one of the earliest expounders of the book, suggested that the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls, are not to be understood as referring to different periods of time following each other in chronological order, but are repetitions in different imagery of the same historical events or period. This is called the Recapitulation Theory, and it also has continued through the centuries to commend itself to students as worthy of consideration. But by far the most important contributions to the solution of the problems presented have been made during comparatively recent times.

The Scientific Method, or Biblical Criticism.

Three lines of study have been pursued with great care by some of the foremost scholars of the day. In the first place, the text and language of the extant manuscripts, as well as quotations by patristic writers, have been studied with much labor and research, with the result that while the text of Erasmus was most corrupt, since he had access to only one cursive, and while the text of the King James version was far from perfect, the received text of to-day is believed to be fairly reliable. Secondly, a group of scholars led by Dr. R. S. Charles of Oxford has given to the world a fairly comprehensive and intimate acquaintance with the contents and characteristics of that somewhat large body of Jewish and Christian writings called Apocalyptic literature, to which the Apocalypse of John undoubtedly belongs. And lastly, Sir Wm. Ramsay has made an exhaustive study of the historical situation and has revealed to us the political, social, and religious conditions of Asia Minor at the time when the Apocalypse of John was written. As a result of these thoroughly scientific lines of investigation, together with a study of the history of the interpretation of the book, scholars are now practically agreed as to the principles according to which the book should be interpreted, and also as to its great message for its first readers, and the truths which it contains for the followers of Christ in every age.

I have spoken of these lines of investigation as scientific because they seek to discover the facts before adopting any particular theory

concerning the book or any portion of it. This is the method demanded by Lord Bacon more than three hundred years ago, as a general principle to be followed in the pursuit of knowledge. It is called the Inductive Method, and when applied to the study of the scriptures has produced what is known by the general term Biblical Criticism or the more specific terms, Textual, Historical or Literary Criticism, according to the particular line of investigation followed. Unfortunately the functions and processes of the two latter are sometimes included under the much-dreaded, ambiguous and misleading term, Higher Criticism, while the term Lower Criticism (for what reason I know not) has been applied to the study of manuscripts and versions for the purpose of getting back as nearly as possible to the original text. When it is understood that all these terms are but names which have been applied to the researches of students along various lines in order to ascertain all the pertinent facts, so that correct conclusions may be arrived at, the fear and suspicion of the method, as such, will forever vanish.

Of course such a method is not without its dangers. The student may consciously or unconsciously have in his mind a theory which he is anxious to establish, and consequently may bring forward only such facts as will support this theory, while he neglects or suppresses equally important facts which would tend to weaken his theory or make it untenable. Again, while he may be entirely sincere and unprejudiced in his investigation he may rush to a premature and unwarranted conclusion before all the facts have been disclosed or with a too superficial consideration of the data in his possession. That such mistakes have been made, and as a result, unwarranted conclusions arrived at and fallacious theories advanced and advocated is much to be regretted. But it is also to be regretted that many who, as a consequence of these mistaken views, have rushed to the defence of the Old Book, have in so doing condemned in a general and unqualified manner all Higher Critics and Higher Criticism as the agency of the devil and the most prolific source of present-day error. What they were really combatting was not Higher Criticism but the ill-supported conclusions of some so-called scholars who had not been critical enough, or, in other words, sufficiently scientific to take into consideration all the data available or to give the ascertained facts the importance they demanded. Let us understand once for all that what is unfortunately known as Higher Criticism is not to be identified with any particular conclusions or theories which any writer or school of writers has advocated in regard to any problem or any portion of the scriptures. It is rather a method of approach, an attempt to apply the Inductive Method to the study of the various books of the Bible.

Apocalyptic Literature.

Now when we apply this method to the study of the Book of Revelation and seek to ascertain the data furnished by the book itself, several facts emerge almost immediately, and one of the most important is furnished by the very first word, "The *Apocalypse* of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him to show unto His servants the things which must shortly come to pass." This first word acquaints us with the fact that the book itself claims to be an Apocalypse, and therefore belongs to that important body of literature already referred to, which came into existence about the beginning of the Christian era, or to be more exact, from about 200 B.C. to 150 A.D. In pre-Christian times it sprang from that section of the Jewish people whose devotional spirit was kept aflame by their unquenchable faith in God and loyalty to Jehovah during a period of political decline and of frequent and distressing persecutions. They are to be distinguished on the one hand from those legalists and Pharisees who had turned almost exclusively to the law as their hope, and on the other hand from the time-serving Sadducees who had given themselves over to a thorough-going worldliness. As devotees of Jehovah and firm believers in His promised redemption, they looked eagerly for the advent of the Messiah. Many of them indeed believed Jesus of Nazareth to be that Messiah, became His devoted followers during his earthly ministry, and after His resurrection and ascension, looked and longed for His speedy return. While there is no doubt that some writers like Sweitzer and Loisy have over-estimated the influence of these enthusiasts upon the form and essence of the doctrines of the New Testament and have exaggerated the importance of the eschatological standpoint in the interpretation of the New Testament writings, yet it must be recognized that this section of the Jewish people did largely create the congenial atmosphere for the coming of Christ and prepared the way for the reception of much of the teaching which the New Testament has given to the world.

Apocalyptic writings possess the following marked characteristics:

1. They are written in highly figurative language and imagery.
2. They predict the speedy intervention of God on behalf of His suffering people.
3. The writer is given visions of heaven, sometimes of seven heavens with God seated on His throne in the seventh and surrounded by angels and archangels and all the gorgeous and sublime paraphernalia of the heavenly court.
4. In delivering their messages they frequently make use of former visions, figures and imagery, and even of whole apocalypses which they adapt to their immediate purpose. The visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, with elements of Persian, Babylonian, and Greek theology and mythology are introduced to intensify the author's

meaning, and to increase the awe and influence of his message. Indeed we find in all these writers a common stock of ideas, and common modes of representation which seem to have become conventional.

5. Lastly, many of these writings are pseudonymous, sent forth in the name of some Old Testament saint, such as Enoch, Moses, Isaiah, Baruch or Daniel, whose traditions they seek to perpetuate, and whose faith and devotion they seek to impress.

Now when we study the contents of this literature, the popular beliefs and traditions recorded, and the well-known figures and images it employs, and then go through the Apocalypse of John, we find that it possesses the same characteristics as these older and contemporary apocalyptic writings. It makes use of the same figures and imagery; the author is translated to the heavenly court and given a vision of God and the angels; he announces the speedy intervention of God on behalf of His suffering saints and the complete overthrow of their enemies; he makes use of the visions, traditions and apocalypses of former writers; and it is not an impossible, nor even a very improbable assumption that his work is pseudonymous. One has only to take up a good critical commentary as that of Moffatt, Swete or Anderson Scott to find that the student is constantly referred, for expressions and ideas similar to that under discussion, to such works as the Book of Enoch, The Book of the Secrets of Enoch, The Apocalypse of Baruch, The Psalms of Solomon, The Testament of Levi, The Book of Esdras, etc., etc.

But while the modes and means of expression are characteristically apocalyptic and Jewish, the ideas which the author seeks to convey are distinctively Christian ideas. The work is dominated for the most part by the Christian spirit. It is represented as a message from Christ Himself, and is delivered with His sanction and authority. All this helps us to understand what John meant by the use of this apocalyptic material. It teaches us that the pictures presented, the figures used, and the descriptions given must not be taken too literally. They simply constitute the author's attempt to impress his readers with the supreme importance of the truths and principles which he was applying to their particular situation and trying circumstances. It also enables us to see that we must not look for a meaning in all the details of an image or picture, for in most cases an older apocalypse or vision was introduced for the sake of one main idea only, and when that is realized the minor details can be safely ignored as having no significance for the readers as they had none for the writer himself.

Historical Situation.

A second fact of importance reveals itself in several verses near the beginning of the book, as also in its closing chapter, the fact that whatever truths the book may contain for the people of God in sub-

sequent ages, its primary message was for the members of the Christian communities of Asia Minor during the writer's own time. "The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him to show unto His servants *the things which must shortly come to pass.*" "Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy and keep the things that are written therein *for the time is at hand.*" "John—to the seven churches which are in Asia." "I, John your brother and companion in tribulation." "What thou seest write in a book *and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna,*" etc., etc.

"And He saith unto me, These sayings are faithful and true, and the Lord, the Spirit of the Prophets, sent His angel to show unto His servants *the things which must shortly come to pass.*" "And He saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book *for the time is at hand.*" This is in striking contrast to the older writers of Apocalyptic who represented themselves as Old Testament seers, who, ages before, were given the vision of these latter times but were commanded to *seal them up* until the time came for their visions to be made known.

Now, if the message of the book was intended primarily for the people of the writer's own day, and must be interpreted in the light of its conditions, the necessity at once arises to determine as nearly as may be what that time was, and what were the circumstances of his readers which occasioned the writing of the book. The earliest external evidence is that of Irenaeus, who places it in the reign of Domitian, but many students influenced by references in the book itself, have been led to reject this testimony. In chapter eleven, a reference to the temple and its courts has led certain writers to the conclusion that it must have been written while the temple was still standing, i.e., before the year 70 A.D. In chapter thirteen the almost unmistakable reference to Nero has driven others to decide on the reign of that cruel monarch as the probable date. And again the reference in chapter seventeen to the seven rulers has led to various speculations, some beginning their reckoning with Caesar, and some with Augustus, while some include the short reigns of the three military rulers who succeeded Nero—Galla, Otho and Vitellius—while others exclude them. Considering all these allusions, and giving to each its due weight in the light of all other data, the following results are now pretty generally accepted. The reference to the temple in chapter eleven, verses one to three, is immediately followed by the story of the two witnesses. Both are evidently introduced from older sources for the purpose of illustration and encouragement in the face of imminent trial. That the references in chapters thirteen and seventeen are to Nero there is practically complete unanimity among present-day scholars. At the same time all these scholars agree that

there is no evidence that the persecutions of Nero extended to the provinces, or that the conditions prevailing in the churches as represented in the book existed in Nero's time. The solution of the difficulty is found in what is known as the Nero-redivivus myth, a widespread belief, which at first took the form that Nero was not dead but in hiding among the Parthians and that he would shortly return at the head of a Parthian army and wreak his vengeance on his enemies. When this did not come to pass, it took another form, based on the conviction that he was something more than human. It was asserted that though he was dead he would rise again from the underworld, assume his throne, and exercise once more his power and authority. The tenth verse of chapter seventeen reads: "And there are seven kings, the five are fallen, and one is and the other is not yet come, and when he cometh he must continue a little while." Such a reference seems very clear and definite, and if we begin our reckoning with Augustus, with whom emperor worship was really inaugurated, and if we leave out the three military rulers already mentioned who did not attain the status of emperors, the sixth ruler, who now is, would be Vespasian, and the seventh, who must continue for a little while, would be Titus, who as a matter of fact reigned only two years. But now comes in verse eleven, as a further explanation, "And the beast that was and is not, is himself also an eighth," which on the same reckoning brings us to Domitian, and we have *Nero restored*, or the Evil Spirit of Nero reincarnated in Domitian. The writer is evidently living in Domitian's reign and is either using a former writing first produced in the reign of Vespasian, and bringing it up to date by adding verse eleven, or he is following a common apocalyptic practice of throwing himself back in thought to Vespasian's reign, and representing history under the form of prophecy. The fact is, that the earliest date at which the political, social and religious conditions presented by the book are found to exist in the Asian Communities, was in the reign of Domitian. It was he who, as far as history throws any light on the subject, first took his inherited divinity so seriously that the cult of emperor worship was generally extended to the provinces and enforced by law, so that men and women of all classes were compelled to worship his image. The book represents the churches as having been established for many years, so long, indeed, that they had passed through former persecutions in which some had suffered martyrdom, and that now they were in danger of decay and corruption from within. All this is in harmony with what would be the conditions of the churches in the reign of Domitian; it coincides with the interpretation of the references in chapter seventeen, given above, and also harmonizes with the very early external evidence of Irenæus. Hence all the facts point to the latter part of Domitian's reign as the most probable period during which the book

was produced, and that it was called forth by the persecutions inflicted, or about to be inflicted by that monarch and his agents, on the faithful Christians of Asia who would not submit to the imperial demand for universal worship of the emperor.

Unity and Authorship.

A careful study of the language, style and arrangement of the book leaves no room for doubt that in its present form it is a unity, the work of one author. But it is also clear that he has used older sources, both Jewish and Christian, and it is quite possible that different portions of the book have been written at different times and later combined into one whole, either by the author himself, or someone closely associated with him. A number of scholars have adopted this hypothesis for the following reasons:

- (1) It seems to explain the various historical references.
- (2) It might be accepted as an explanation of the repeated representations of the coming disasters under the different figures of seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls or vials.
- (3) And lastly, it accounts for the numerous representations of the security of the saints, and the blessedness of the faithful in heaven. These are found not only in those sublime descriptions of the last chapters, but also in the well-known and oft-quoted passages of chapters seven, fourteen, fifteen and nineteen. Though at one time this theory appealed to me with considerable force, I do not now consider it the most natural or satisfactory explanation of the problems involved. The various historical references, as we have seen, find their most probable solution in the author's use of older sources or the employment of certain literary devices. The seven-sealed book becomes most significant when understood as symbolizing the authority of Christ over the events of the immediate future, while the trumpets stand for the promulgation or introduction of these events, and the bowls for their actual execution. This is in perfect accord with the highly artistic arrangement, by which the seventh in each case is unfolded in a new series of seven, the seventh seal disclosing the seven trumpets, and the seventh trumpet revealing and introducing the seven bowls. Again the frequent representations of the glories of the heavenly reward, especially those just before the opening of the seventh seal, the sounding of the seventh trumpet, and the pouring out of the seventh bowl, are evidently introduced to encourage and inspire Christians to devotion and faithfulness in view of the disasters about to be revealed in each case. Thus the theory that different portions were written at different times, though possible, is not at all necessary. Whether we adopt it or not, the final arrangement of the book, its peculiar language and grammatical construction, which are

the same throughout, leave no room for doubt that it is one man's work.

Who this man was is at present difficult if not impossible to decide. The tradition that it was John the Apostle is not of very early origin and has little to support it, while all the facts of language, grammatical construction, and even doctrinal standpoint lead us to a different conclusion. The Gospel is written in simple, clear but correct idiomatic Greek, while the Apocalypse abounds in Hebraisms, grammatical errors and faulty constructions on every page. The standpoint is decidedly Christian in both, but in the one it is eschatological, external and Jewish, while in the other it is inward and spiritual, and more in harmony with the logos doctrine of Philo and the Greeks. That the Apostle John spent much time in Asia Minor as has been generally supposed, is now a matter of considerable doubt, but however that may be, the facts as we know them to-day make the hypothesis of his authorship of the Apocalypse almost, if not quite, an impossibility. It is more probable that the author was John the Presbyter, or some spiritual leader in the churches of Asia, now unknown, who, like other apocalyptic writers, chose the name of John in order to write pseudonymously.

The Message—For Its Age and Every Age.

The identity of the author is not clear and happily is not of very great importance. What is clear, and at the same time of greatest importance, is the fact that whoever the writer may have been, he was a saint of God well known to the churches of Asia Minor; that he had been banished to Patmos because of his fidelity to Jesus, whom he believed to be the Christ now exalted to the throne of God; that he claimed to be a prophet of God commissioned by this exalted and glorified Christ; and that thus commissioned, he comes forth with a message of divine warning and instruction, of divine comfort and encouragement to the suffering saints of the churches in Asia, from among whom some have already been called upon to suffer martyrdom, and for many of whom grievous trials and persecutions are again imminent. He assures them that whatever hardships they may be called upon to endure, and whatever sacrifices it may be necessary for them to make, even though it be the giving up of life itself, their future and all its experiences are in the hands and under the absolute control of their Saviour who has Himself suffered and died for them. That no sacrifice for His sake will go unrewarded. Indeed, the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. So certain is he of this that he can say: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord," i.e., under these circumstances. or in other words, who die a martyr's death.

On the other hand they are assured that the blasphemous emperor-worship of Rome will be speedily overthrown. Rome herself shall be utterly destroyed, and if any are unwilling to suffer for Christ's sake, but rather yield themselves to the demands of Rome, not only will they be deprived of the glorious rewards of the faithful, but the awful fate of Rome will be theirs, even the destiny of eternal woe.

And these great and eternal truths of our Christian religion which the author enunciated in his peculiar manner and applied to the saints of his day in their circumstances of suffering and distress, are true in this age and in every age for the people of God when called upon to suffer and sacrifice for Christ's sake. "Blessed is he that endureth temptation." "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake." "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake; rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven."

I have already pointed out that since these great truths were expressed in figurative language, and impressed upon the minds and hearts of the readers by means of current traditions and popular beliefs, these figures and traditions must not be taken too literally, nor too much significance attributed to details. The error and positive harm which may result from this mistake is well illustrated by the interpretation of the binding of Satan in chapter twenty, and the reign of the martyrs with Christ for a thousand years. The literal interpretation of this picture has resulted, as we have seen, in curious and morbid attempts to determine the end of the world; it has led multitudes into the mistake of disparaging the present dispensation, and of idly looking for a spectacular intervention from heaven to set up the kingdom of God on earth; and it has forced into complete eclipse the great and all-important truth that the kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation, but is even now being established and perfected by the risen Lord, to whom has been given for this very purpose, *all power in heaven and in earth*. It is entirely out of harmony not only with those principles of interpretation which alone seem to furnish a satisfactory solution of the difficulties encountered in the book, but also with the teachings of the New Testament in general concerning our Lord's return. While the New Testament speaks of the coming of the Son of Man in different senses, it knows only one return of Christ in the sense here indicated, viz., His second coming in judgment at the consummation of all things.

In seeking for the author's meaning in this much discussed passage there are several other facts in addition to those already mentioned that must be kept in mind. First, it should be understood that throughout the book numbers and numerical expressions are almost invariably used figuratively: *Forty and two months; three and a half days; A time and times and half a time*, are all different modes of

expressing the same numerical value, but in no case do they represent an exact numerical value, but only an indefinite period of time. Secondly, it should be noted that even if this picture be taken literally, the martyrs are not represented definitely as reigning on earth.

Again, we should remember that this picture of a messianic kingdom in which the martyrs reign, is an apocalyptic idea found first in the Slavonic Book of Enoch, and repeated by other writers; that the duration of the reign is not always the same, it being four hundred years in Second Esdras instead of one thousand, and consequently the value of the idea is not to be found in the details of the picture, but in the principal thought which it conveys. Here our author is simply using this conventional picture of the messianic kingdom and the binding of Satan to convey to his readers the assurance that when they see Rome destroyed they may know that Satan, who has been the source of all Rome's power and wickedness, is also overthrown. Though not destroyed, his power is restrained, and a period will follow when the martyrs who have suffered on earth will reign with Christ in heaven, and the saints on earth will no longer be tyrannized by ungodly rulers, but on the contrary will themselves hold positions of authority and responsibility.

Further study in detail is neither possible nor necessary in this paper. Those interested may pursue the investigation for themselves with the aid of the excellent critical commentaries and suggestive expositions now available. It only remains for me to give a very brief outline of the work which, though concise, will I trust be sufficiently comprehensive and true to fact to enable us to see clearly what the author is endeavoring to do for his fellow-sufferers and how he accomplishes his task.

A Short Summary of the Book.

After the superscription in verses one to three of the first chapter, and the writer's introduction of himself to his readers in verses four to eight, there follows the description of a vision given to him in Patmos. This is a vision of the glorified Master Himself now clothed with the robes of judgment and authority. He is commissioned to write to the Christians of Asia as represented by seven churches, which are selected for some reason no longer apparent. These open letters, which take us to the end of the third chapter, are appeals for vigor and vigilance in the presence of impending danger. The writer speaks in the name of their Lord, who knows their condition and their struggles, alike against inward corruption and external pressure, and as one also to whom their conflict is of the utmost moment. To all who overcome are given promises of rich and mystic heavenly rewards. The letters are brought to a close by the promises to the church at Laodicea: "To him that overcometh will I give to sit with

me on my throne even as I also overcame and am set
Father on His throne."

While this forms a fitting conclusion to the letters intended also to prepare the way for what follows, for immediately like other Apocalyptic writers, the author is caught up to heaven and this very throne is revealed to him. Seated upon it is God the Father of Heaven and Earth, in the midst of it is Christ, while round about are angels and elders and all the awe-inspiring inhabitants and things of heaven. Thus in chapters four and five the writer is occupied with Christ's relation to the churches themselves and with His relation to the immediate future in which the churches are so deeply concerned. This future is represented by a book in the right hand of God. No one in heaven or on earth under the earth is able to open this book or loose the seals but the Lamb in the midst of the throne, even Jesus, who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Thus the immediate future, however it may be of misfortune and disaster, is under the control and authority of Christ. In chapter six, as each of the seals is broken, there is disclosed to the Christians of Asia what the nature of these coming woes will be. They consist of invasion, pestilence, famine, persecution, and even martyrdom. Those who are to suffer martyrdom are encouraged by the assurance that their fellow martyrs who have suffered before them are now clothed with white robes and given a place of honor and distinction in the Heavenly temple before the altar, while they wait until their number is complete. To them is announced, in the breaking of the sixth seal, the fate awaiting their persecutors when the impending judgment is ushered in.

Before the seventh seal is broken, chapter seven is introduced to strengthen and encourage not only the martyrs, but all the faithful who are to pass through these troublous times. An older Jewish apocalypse of the sealing of the twelve tribes is used to represent the Christian Church as the true Israel sealed with the seal of God. Then is revealed the innumerable company of faithful believers enjoying eternal security and bliss. Since the Christians of Asia are soon to suffer tribulation they are shown this white-robed throng who have "come up out of great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Since they are soon to experience famine, they are assured that this blessed company "shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

In chapter eight the seventh seal is broken and naturally we expect a representation of the promised judgment. And this is really what we get, but not immediately. It is heralded by seven angels to

whom are given seven trumpets at the sounding of which are revealed certain preliminary judgments, the purpose of which is to bring the unbelieving to repentance. Before the trumpets sound and these preliminary judgments begin, there is an impressive silence in heaven, and all the saints on earth are assured that their prayers are not only heard, but are given added weight, by a censer of heavenly incense in the hands of an angel. Then come the blowing of the trumpets in chapters eight and nine, and the nature of these preliminary judgments is unfolded. As the seal is the symbol of authority, the trumpet is the symbol of power and the signal for war and the beginning of God's judgments. The first four trumpets set in motion forces of ruin which fall on natural objects and the world of nature is thus represented as being used of God to punish evil men. The last three trumpets have to do with human life and are introduced by an eagle flying in heaven and crying "Woe, woe, woe, for them that dwell on the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels who are yet to sound." The fifth trumpet introduces an onslaught of demonic powers in the form of locusts loosed from the abyss by a fallen angel. The sixth brings a much-dreaded invasion of Parthian hordes, and chapter nine closes with the announcement that notwithstanding these admonitory judgments, the remnant of mankind would not repent and we must therefore prepare for the seventh trumpet.

Here again in chapter ten, before the sounding of the seventh trumpet, as in chapter seven before the breaking of the seventh seal, we have another interruption. Instead of the seventh trumpet, a strong angel is seen holding a little book. He is ushered in by seven thunders uttering voices which the prophet is not permitted to record. This may indicate that in addition to the disasters he attempts to describe, there will doubtless be others the nature of which he is not permitted to foresee. He is bidden rather to eat the book and finds it sweet to the taste but very bitter when actually devoured. Thus he and his people are assured that the end for which they are looking and longing will be a blessed answer to their prayers but will nevertheless mean for them bitter suffering and distress. They are comforted and encouraged in chapter eleven by the introduction of two older sources, the measuring of the temple, indicating security, and the well known story of the two witnesses, who, though persecuted even unto death, were restored again to life and came off victorious.

When the seventh trumpet sounds great voices are heard in heaven declaring that the end is at hand, and the rulership of the world is truly in the hands of Christ. The preliminary judgments are now ended and the stage is set for the actual and complete overthrow of the enemies of the Kingdom. Before this is depicted as it is to take place on earth, the prophet, in harmony with common apocalyptic

belief, presents to him in chapter twelve a view of this conflict as having been already decided in heaven. He uses an ancient sun myth to show that on one side is Christ, and on the other, Satan in the form of a great dragon. War takes place in heaven, Satan is cast down to the earth, and from the heavenly hosts is heard a song of rejoicing over Satan's defeat, but at the same time a cry of woe and warning because he now turns to afflict the Church on earth. In chapter thirteen the conflict on earth is revealed. The dragon gives his power to a beast rising from the sea, whom all the world admires and worships. Another beast rises from the land and is given all the power of the first beast in order to enforce this worship, and all the infamy and tyranny of the beasts and the dragon is personified in a certain man whom they may recognize by the mystic number 666. The author evidently intends them to see in these beasts the cult of emperor worship and the priesthood which enforced it, while the wickedness and blasphemy of this movement would be recognized as incarnated in reigning emperor.

He immediately proceeds in chapter fourteen to give them additional comfort and encouragement that in the impending conflict they may be faithful even unto death. There is first presented to them a picture of the Lamb standing on Mount Zion and with Him an indefinite number of followers who are pure and undefiled, while on the other hand is proclaimed the complete overthrow and destruction of Rome, and all who yield to worship the beast. Rome is to be reaped as ripe grain with a sickle, or as grapes with a sharp knife. Just before the seven bowls are introduced by which this destruction is to be accomplished, by way of contrast, the suffering saints are given still another view of the glory of heaven which is represented as a sea of glass mingled with fire, and of the blissful triumph of those who had come off victorious in their conflict with the beast. These sing the song of Moses at the exodus—"Great and marvellous are thy works, Oh, Lord our Almighty God. Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of Ages."

And now comes the actual judgment and overthrow of the Empire and her blasphemous emperor worship. This is represented by seven angels with seven bowls from which God's wrath is poured out. The imagery is that of the Egyptian plagues but in a different order and form. Sores, blood, fire, heat and darkness, and lastly unclean spirits which bring all these ungodly powers together in a war to destroy them. A great battle follows, a very Armageddon or as we would say to-day, a veritable Waterloo. With the pouring out of the seventh bowl the judgment is completed, and the Great City, the Babylon of the West is fallen and given the cup of the wine of the fierceness of God's wrath.

In chapters seventeen and eighteen the description of this judgment is repeated in a more definite and explanatory form, leaving no

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doubt in the readers' mind that Rome is speedily to be destroyed and the reigning emperor in whom the evil genius of Nero is reincarnated is to go into perdition. So complete and sudden will be the destruction of the city that all those people from land and sea who traded with her in time past will come as usual with their wares, and gaze upon her desolation with astonishment.

In chapters nineteen and twenty is revealed the fact that not only Rome will be overthrown but Satan also by whom Roman emperor worship is inspired. The victory represented in chapter twelve as taking place in heaven is now actually executed on earth. Satan is captured by a strong angel and cast into the abyss. There he is restrained during an indefinite period when the martyrs will reign in heaven and the saints will be triumphant on earth. Before the final consummation of all things, which now cannot be long delayed, Satan's power will again be exerted and the final and decisive conflict between the forces of evil and the forces of righteousness will take place. This conflict will be world wide, including Gog and Magog, which like *Jews and Greeks* or *Greeks and Barbarians* is an inclusive term meaning all. Righteousness, however, must and will finally prevail. The devil will be cast into the lake of fire. The New Jerusalem will come down out of Heaven. Christ shall receive as His bride the whole redeemed and glorified body of Christian believers and all shall enter into the eternal glory and unspeakable blessedness of heaven. And then "there shall be no more curse, and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it and His servants shall serve Him. And they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light and they shall reign forever and ever."

